



## Book Reviews / Buchbesprechungen

**Boško Pešić, Pavao Žitko (eds.)**

### **Existence and the One**

**Teseo, Buenos Aires 2019**

The collective volume *Existence and the One* represents a collaboration of philosophers from universities in Italy, Croatia, Japan, France, Poland and Germany. They aspired to create a contemporary academic dialogue engaging with the great metaphysical theories of the past by taking into consideration the modern-day need for an inclusive dialogue and a repositioning of philosophy, itself addressing the very question of meaning and usefulness of philosophy being brought forward with increasing insistence. Philosophy and philosophical thinking are facing scrutiny from both the public and academic circles. Doubt rose over the purpose and importance of studying and teaching philosophy nowadays; the time of great influential thinkers that belong to the philosophical tradition is long gone and often forgotten. Once the crowning jewel of one's academic pursuits, today philosophy has been reduced to just one of the branches of humanities.

In today's science-oriented world, the significance of philosophical thought and tradition is declining, philosophy no longer has privileged access to the truth with all the truth considered important being obtained exclusively by scientific methods. The ancient philosophical quest for meaning and truth has been pushed aside, and society has prioritised the development of the STEM area, relying on it to find the most important answers and solutions to modern problems. Furthermore, in an unprecedented and potentially very dangerous reversal of roles, the scientific method has become the dominant standard by which the success or failure of all human activities is measured and has imposed its standards of usefulness and productiveness on philosophy. Facing blatant demands to produce a quantifiable benefit to society somehow, philoso-

phers are nowadays facing the realisation that philosophy is at the very edges of public perception whereas once it held an irreplaceable social role, and with this realisation comes the demand for responsibility in our philosophical thought and our academic writing. The awareness of the current predicament of philosophy has underlined the importance of this collection of papers for its editors and contributing authors, who have taken upon themselves the delicate and unenviable task of creating a contemporary academic dialogue, rethinking the nature and meaning of existence and the philosophical problem of the One, and through those questions trying to establish the significance of philosophy for modern-day society.

The absence of philosophically responsible thinking, as the editors Boško Pešić and Pavao Žitko warn readers in the preface, has preceded notably dark periods of human history.

Understanding the importance of philosophical writing that is much more than a reproduction of great ideas plucked from the pages of philosophy's history, the contributing authors endeavour to express a deep social criticism by initiating a contemporary exploration of fundamental philosophical questions such as the question of the One and of transcendence, encompassing problems of unity and uniqueness, individuality and universality, emphasising the inherent value of the human being and its specific experience of existence, that being a very distinctive type of existence and a prominent theme in modern post-Hegelian philosophy.

Reflecting on the existence and the One prompts the questioning of the relationship between existence as characteristic of a human being and transcendence, more specifically its role in distinctive human experience. In her paper, Stefania Achella explains Jaspers's statement that a human being, given its distinctive experience of the world, must necessarily deal with transcendence, an overview of Jaspers's understanding of transcendence as it evolved throughout his career and his views

on interpreting the One as the One God. Jaspers can be considered to be a messenger of hope, giving human beings agency over their purpose and freedom to change themselves continuously through their actions, urging them “towards communication, loving struggle, rejection of force” (p. 34). Jaspers’s message, while profoundly optimistic, is at the same time “extremely demanding, calling for the highest spiritual effort, for courage, and for risk-taking with no guarantees” (p. 218) because it places great responsibility on the individual’s choices while also denying them the comforting illusion of safety and reminding them of the constant unpredictability and insecurity of life.

In his contribution to the collection, Alojz Ćubelić offers a thoughtful reminder that contemplation is not a sufficient contribution to society, even though some philosophers focused entirely on contemplation and revered reflection, thought and meditation, that they are meaningless if they are not followed by action (pp. 63–79). Philosophy has been pushed to the outlines of academia and forgotten by the public in no small part because of its passivity and reluctance to actively tackle social problems while reflecting on them deeply and from a safe distance.

The human existence, especially the predicament of human abandoned in the world, is a major theme for philosophers Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. In his paper, Boško Pešić argues that because of the depth of their exploration and the significance they placed on considering human a being that can design and recreate itself, it would be wrong to identify their philosophy of existence with existentialism (pp. 163–180). As part of the human existence, humans attempt to understand the world, and thus begins the quest for truth that is vital to every individual life as well as philosophical tradition. A comprehensive analysis of Jaspers’s work *On Truth* explicates the influence of the relationship to the One and the understanding of truth as the one truth, and also demonstrates that Jaspers built his concept of truth on the philosophical tradition but did not refrain from using that tradition as a foundation on which to build his own thought with the goal of addressing the pressing issues of his time, which included the rise of public confidence in science and the dangers of totalitarian collectivism, which makes him an important example of the kind of responsible philosophical thought this collection aspires to achieve (pp. 219–242).

Nowadays philosophy is found on the periphery, on the outskirts of both the academic

world and society in general, subjected to increasingly flagrant questionings of its purpose and contribution to the modern world from the academic institutions it has been compressed into and habitual ridicule from the public that often finds the word “philosopher” to be a practical shortening for “someone who talks excessively without making a comprehensible point”. To put it in terms of Jaspers’s philosophy, this means philosophy is facing a limit situation, a crisis that shifts the perspective and brings into focus what is most important. Jaspers saw limit situations as beginnings, pivotal moments that can propel forward and should, therefore, be seen as opportunities. Taking the time to be critical of one’s thought is an essential part of philosophical thinking, and with that in mind, we should re-evaluate our role in society today and our efforts (or lack thereof) to bring important issues to attention. Being in this difficult situation of diminishing credibility and merit could be precisely what philosophy needed to awake from its slumber, emerge from its metaphorical cave and demonstrate what it is that philosophy can bring to the world. Once upon a time, philosophers had the respect of their communities and their thinking was valued. The current crisis has highlighted how far removed we are from that position right now and how close to being entirely obsolete. However, looking at Jaspers’s philosophy explored in several papers in this collection, we are reminded that we alone have agency over our thoughts, our actions, as well as the role we choose to have in society. Us philosophers can choose a responsible role and write to make important and relevant statements. Philosophy, as thought, has the potential to contribute to every individual’s life by assisting them in realising their potential to take agency over their lives. In this manner, philosophy can have a direct and profound impact on every individual and help them to achieve fulfilment in their lives in a way that is not and could never be subject to scientific research or experimentation, and by accomplishing this philosophy will reconnect with its primary purpose.

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